

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 IO-10 AID-05 OMB-01 INRE-00 SSO-00

NSCE-00 USIE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07

L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 DPW-01

NIC-01 SY-05 OPR-02 TRSE-00 ACDA-05 A-01 OC-05 CCO-00

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FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9850

INFO CINCPAC HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY SAIGON PRIORITY

USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1450

C O N F I D E N T I A L PHNOM PENH 4913

E.O 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS, CB

SUBJ: MARCH 18, THE 77TH DAY OF THE OFFENSIVE

REF: PHNOM PENH 4849

1. SUMMARY. THUS FAR (1800 HOURS LOCAL) THE FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF SIHANOUK'S DEPOSITION HAS BEEN FAIRLY CALM AROUND PHNOM PENH. THE KC FIRED A LARGE NUMBER OF ROCKETS BUT RELATIVELY FEW LANDED WITHIN THE CITY OR AT POCHENTONG AIRPORT. FANK PROSPECTS AT NEAK LUONG CONTINUED TO WORSEN AS THE KHMER NAVY'S FLOATING BASE THERE WAS ABANDONED AND FANK DEFENDERS WERE DRIVEN OFF THE ISLAND JUST NORTH OF THE MEKONG RIVER CITY. THE SECOND PHASE OF THE OPERATION DESIGNED TO CLEAR OUT THE ROCKET BELT NORTHWEST OF POCHENTONG IS STILL EXPERIENCING DIFFICULTIES. END SUMMARY.

2. THE KC THUS FAR HAVE DONE LITTLE AROUND PHNOM
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PENH TO DISRUPT THE FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF SIHANOUK'S

DEPOSITION. (NO CELEBRATIONS WERE SCHEDULED.) TEN 107MM ROCKETS LANDED ON OR NEAR POCHENTONG BUT THERE WERE NO 105MM HOWITZER SHELLS. FIFTEEN 107MM ROCKETS LANDED IN THE RIVER IN FRONT OF THE ROYAL PALACE, ONE LANDED IN A RESIDENTIAL AREA KILLING ONE PERSON AND WOUNDING NINE, AND TWO OTHERS FELL BEHIND THE FRENCH EMBASSY. MOST OF THE ROCKET ACTIVITY WAS ON THE PERIPHERY OF THE CAPITAL; FORTY ROUNDS OF MIXED CALIBER INCLUDING ROCKETS WERE FIRED AT TWO POSITIONS ON THE MEKONG EAST BANK OPPOSITE PHNOM PENH, AND TWENTY MORE HIT SOUTH OF THE KHMER NAVAL BASE, KILLING EIGHT PERSONS AND WOUNDING TWENTY. A LATE REPORT SAYS THAT A KC FORCE PENETRATED TO THE MEKONG EAST BANK BUT HAS BEEN SEALED OFF BY PARATROOP UNITS. THE ACTION IS CONTINUING.

3. GOVERNMENT FORCES IN THE EMBATTLED NEAK LUONG-BANAM AREA ALONG THE LOWER MEKONG SUFFERED MORE REVERSES. LATE MARCH 17, THE FLOATING KHMER NAVAL BASE ANCHORED OFF KOH CHAMROEUN ISLAND JUST NORTH OF NEAK LUONG CAME UNDER EXTREMELY HEAVY FIRE FROM THE WEST BANK OF THE RIVER WHICH FANK HAD ABANDONED THE DAY BEFORE (REFTTEL). THE NAVY PERSONNEL WERE EVACUATED, INCLUDING 40 WOUNDED. HOWEVER, THE FLOATING BASE, WHICH CONTAINED EXTENSIVE REPAIR AND REFITTING FACILITIES HAS BEEN LOST. EARLY THE NEXT MORNING, FANK DEFENDERS ON KOH CHAMROEUN ISLAND ITSELF WERE FORCED OFF. NEAK LUONG AND BANAM CONTINUE TO RECEIVE HEAVY ATTACKS BY FIRE, WITH 15 PERSONS REPORTED KILLED AND 45 WOUNDED.

4. THE SECOND PHASE OF THE FANK OPERATION NORTHWEST OF POCHENTONG DESIGNED TO CLEAR OUT KC ROCKET LAUNCHING AREAS CONTINUES TO BE HAMPERED BY LACK OF COORDINATION. IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BEGIN TODAY BUT WE ARE AWAITING FIRMER INFORMATION.

5. COMMUNIST FORCES MAINTAINED THEIR PRESSURE AROUND THE PROVINCIAL CAPITAL OF KAMPOT IN SOUTHWESTERN CAMBODIA AND AGAINST SEVERAL LOCATIONS IN BATTAMBANG PROVINCE. HOWEVER, THE SITUATION IN THESE

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AREAS HAS NOT CHANGED SIGNIFICANTLY.
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